

My Special Olympics Experience – Casey Cresbaugh, Sparta High School Senior

Every Tuesday from late October to the beginning of December I was fortunate enough to spend an hour and half of my time training kids participating in the Special Olympics. Our job was to teach them about basketball, mainly shooting and dribbling skills. I play basketball so it was fun to be able to teach these kids something I personally love to do.

The first day I remember being very nervous because I had no idea what to expect. I knew a few of the kids from school but there were many new faces. When we began drills, some of the kids were really good! One boy in particular caught my eye as we tried to help him use all the power in his body to simply reach the net. Unfortunately, the first day he didn't make any. I could see he was disappointed and that really made me upset. This was supposed to be a fun activity and he didn't look happy. So the next week I was extremely excited to get the opportunity to work with all the kids again. We were all getting to know each other better and this helped when it came to encouraging them because now I was no longer just a helper but their friend. But during the shooting drills again the same boy once again didn't make a basket. However, he was incredibly close.

At the end of the night, we decided to have a scrimmage, girls versus boys of course. You could literally see each kids face light up when they made a basket or a good pass. And that was when the boy scored. He was so happy, I can't even describe it and his happiness made me happy as well. Every Wednesday in school after a night of basketball, the kids would all come up to me and say hi and tell me how much fun they had last night and already were asking me the plans for next week. On the last night of the training sessions, the same boy who couldn't make a single basket scored 18 within two minutes! You could see all the kids' improvement as the weeks went on and that was the most fulfilling part. I really have made an impact in these kids' lives.

I've learned so much about dealing with different types of people and becoming friends with people I never would have without the Special Olympics. I owe Pass It Along so much for giving me this opportunity. This group of kids loved playing basketball so much that they now have started their own league and now have practices and are hoping to get some games. This has definitely been a life changing experience I will never forget.